

Becoming Weather

Weather, Embodiment and Affect

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Chapter 2

**Contours A: Weathering power and
positionality**

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2 Contours A

Weathering power and positionality

Colonisation and survivance

Grass ticks on my belly
Those red itchy patches
[Spring, early
September]

My parents came to Australia as “10-pound poms” in the late 1960s. “Ten-pound poms” is a name given to the many people who migrated to Australia from the United Kingdom as part of a post-war assisted migration scheme. Under this scheme, the passage of British citizens was subsidised at a rate of 10 pounds, to fill labour shortages and, at its core, to shore up Australia as a white possession, a white settler nation of the British Empire (Moreton-Robinson 2015). My elder sister, then a baby, travelled with my parents for free. The scheme, launched in 1945,¹ took its place along with a raft of policy and legislation, beginning from the first days of Federation in 1901, that together formed the notorious white Australia policy (Ang 2013; Carey and McLisky 2009; Moreton-Robinson 2020). Australia must “populate or perish” with “population” coming from very specific white sources.

The migration of 10-pound poms peaked around the time my parents moved, when over 80,000 Britons relocated in a single year (Fouweather 2013). My dad worked for a company that built houses that rolled out the suburbs of the 1960s and 1970s, some public housing, other private sales designed primarily for working- and middle-class families; those quarter acre blocks of the Australian dream. At the time, my parents didn’t intend to stay and, in fact, returned to the United Kingdom at considerable cost in the early 1970s. Mum was homesick. She missed her Mum and her friends, the land and seasons of England. My brother was born there but, a few years later, they become one of the “boomerang poms” that came back once again. This time it was on their own dime.

I found an advertisement online, one of many used to promote the scheme. In it, there is the outline of a map of Australia emblazoned with the words “WHAT AUSTRALIA OFFERS YOU” written in bold capitals (and with that YOU underlined) through the otherwise blank interior space (see Figure 2.1). Australia looks empty, like some kind of clean slate; as if there are no First Nations, no people, no



Figure 2.1 What Australia offers you?

boundaries, no songs or songlines, no Countries, no ecological communities and no physical terrain. Yet in this clean-slate homogeneity, there, apparently, is much that Australia offers white people.

The casual arrogance and entitlement stun. And the individualism within that phrase, what it offers *you*, yes you, as long as you are a British citizen, the stolen wealth that is so (seemingly) casually shared. Provided you are the right kind of white, that is. And there, in the advertisement, starred at the top, three reasons for coming, along with a higher standard of living (with average wages over 20 pounds a week, two in three families owning a car and two or three television stations available) and a promise of jobs, is weather.² For in Australia, the sun is reliable. There is sunshine, there is sport! *Every* summer is just like last year's! In the 1960s, it seems, the weather behaved for white people.

In this chapter, I turn to the first of weather's contours that I will consider in more detail in this book, that of power, the ways that power relations mediate what weather means and does, the way it constructs nations, whether the colonial fantasy of so-called Australia, or the many Aboriginal nations that have long made up this continent. For, while often constructed as the ultimate "natural" force, weather and our ways of experiencing it, are deeply imbued with power relations. This is how weather can be used to support the mass migration of assisted-passage white people. It is deployed by the architects of a racist state as they imagine, and bring into being, a certain notion of what this "new" country will look like, while simultaneously dismissing the diverse and ongoing connections that have always, will always exist here.

In particular, I'll look to the ways that *aer nullius* has been actively produced and re-produced in Australia. I'll discuss migration and, as an important point of nation-building in the history of Australia, the siting of the capital. I do this to draw out some details of just why it is so important to attend to prior relationships of weather, both colonising relationships and those of resistance and survivance by Aboriginal people. In this discussion of weather, in our co-becomings, we are not beginning with a clean slate.

This chapter is an effort, too, to follow Aunty Shaa and Yandaarra's protocol to know deeply the contours of my place on unceded land, to delve into the uncomfortable realities of how I came to be here (Snelgrove et al 2014). While co-becoming

weather is nourishing, it is complex and there are important, uncomfortable, stories that must be told. By the river on the weekend, some tiny grass ticks found their way onto my body. I must have walked past or inadvertently sat by their nest. They come out in the early spring, big mobs of them, from their nests in grass and leaf litter and rotting timber. The redness of the itchy tick welts that I got on my belly reminds me that it is important to attend to the bites and the itch, the prickliness and pain of weather; to see in the seasons the prior exclusions and violences. I wrote in my diary, “It’s a lot more itchy than you’d think just by looking at it.”

Tending to some of this discomfort and tracing some of my history forms part of my “homework” for walking with, that of unpacking some of my geohistorical and biographic positionality. There are contours of power that place me here, with the grass ticks that cannot be ignored, and the red cedars that light the mountain with their young red leaves. Once so abundant in this valley, the cedars are the “red gold” that timber cutters chased as they colonised these deep forested valleys to the point the cedars were all but gone. The call to acknowledge, trace and learn is an important step in coming to Milpirri. I hope it may play a role in bringing the cold and warm air streams together so that in the storm cloud of their meeting, rain may form.

Not *aer nullius*

Rose coloured light shines through the young leaves
Red cedar lights up the mountain. So many were felled
 [Spring, early-mid September]

The colonisation of Australia was and is built upon a fallacy of *terra nullius*. *Terra nullius* purported that this land was empty before Europeans came; that this land belonged to no one and, indeed, no one belonged to the land. This, despite the Aboriginal people that directly interacted with Cook and the early colonists, despite Aboriginal peoples’ knowledges, paths, connections and systems of Law/Lore. While it was formally overturned in 1992³ in the Supreme Court, the fallacy of *terra nullius* continues to act as the bedrock for the ongoing theft of land in this country (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Watson 2014). The damage was not undone. *Terra nullius* enables me to live here, to type today at the kitchen table in “my” kitchen at “our” small farm, to make decisions about planting, as we have, red cedars and other local rainforest species in the paddock next door in a regeneration project. *Terra nullius* set up the conditions for that paddock to be denuded of beautiful giant trees in the first place. So that these homely, even caring activities are never innocent. They are enabled through theft and exclusion.

This plot of land where I live was once the “school paddock” of the school next door. It was a paddock where kids riding their horses to school could leave them, and where any school livestock could be kept. It’s written there on the old land title in sloping handwritten font. The site was appropriated to the purpose by the Crown which had commandeered all land in eastern Australia. That foundational theft occurred some decades before, when, after charting much of the eastern coastline of

Australia, the so-called discoverer of Australia, James Cook, arrived at an island to the north of the continent which he (re)named “Possession Island.” From there, on 22 August 1770, he wrote the following diary entry:

Notwithstand[ing] I had in the Name of his Majesty taken possession of several places upon this coast I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast from ... Latitude [38° South] down to this place by the Name of New South Wales together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast after which we fired three Volleys of small Arms which were Answerd by the like number from the Ship. (Cook 1770, sic, all spelling as it appears in the diary).

(cited in Rogers et al 2023: 3)

He did this under the justification that the lands were not already owned; that they were empty and there for the taking (Rogers et al 2023). The Aboriginal peoples who clearly lived there were not recognised, their relationships with Country not respected. Ownership, in the colonial understanding, would be established through excluding others, ploughing and working the land, fencing, building permanent structures, and defending land from incursion (Blatman-Thomas and Porter 2019; Jackson et al 2018; Rogers et al 2023). The ways that Aboriginal people were and are in nourishing relationship with land, including through diverse forms of agriculture and care and shelter and knowing and Lore/Law were dismissed, denied, and often violently suppressed (Johnson 2016).

This was how the land got to be Crown land and then a school paddock and then, ultimately, a small farm. Yet the land in this valley is so very far from *nullius*. It is a sacred meeting place. There are birthing pools and men’s ceremonial dance rings, there are pathways and a broad area, “the plains,” of a family camp for gathering. There are complex communities of more-than-human beings forming seasons that come and go and come. The river has names all the way along; its true names sung for millennia. The river is rich with/as stories such as the making of the platypus. Yet, all these layers of belonging and prior existence were denied through *terra nullius* and enforced through frontier violence and exclusion.

When kids no longer rode to school, and the State deemed the land was no longer needed by the school as a paddock, it was “alienated,” made into private property, and so was enrolled in that complex bundle of rights and exclusionary relationships that constitute “land ownership” in capitalist societies (Blomley 2003, 2017; Howitt 2001). It was this foundational theft and the complex sets of power relations that propelled and sustained it that enabled our house to be built several decades ago, and my family to be here today. Such are some of the layers of *terra nullius* that drive ongoing exclusions keeping people, including First Nations people, out, and allowing me and my family in. *Nullius* has, in short, made legal the theft of land, and empowered ongoing, deep violences to the many Aboriginal peoples and Countries that make up the continent. *Terra nullius* is implicitly there in that map of Australia, what it offers

YOU (non-Indigenous person), and me, like many other uninvited guests on these unceded lands.

When invoked, *terra nullius*, speaks often to the land. Yet, the *nullius* that was imagined and then imposed on Australia was, is, never flat; it is not one dimensional (Moreton-Robinson 2015). The idea of *nullius* aimed to erase connections and belongings both below and above ground, as well as in and of the land (Melo Zurita 2020), and of the more-than-human beings that dwell in/on/as the earth, sea and sky. The sky is imagined as empty, devoid of relationships, materiality, belongings; the weather is a blank canvas. This is the fiction of *aer nullius* that sits alongside, is indeed part of, the idea of *terra nullius*. And, like *terra nullius*, through this very claim of blankness, weather becomes available to be enrolled within particular sets of power relations, available to advance and empower certain Western and colonial engagements, including those of conquest.

The idea of *aer nullius* first came to my attention through the work of Métis scholar Zoe Todd, as mentioned in the introduction (Todd 2016). Her work speaks to the ways *aer nullius* informs contemporary debates and understandings around weather and climate. She points, for example, to the ways that many post-humanist and more-than-human engagements, including those that engage with weather, ignore the prior work of Indigenous thinkers, as well as the ways more-than-human agency is deeply embedded in many Indigenous cultures and worldviews. Moves to dismiss and deny the legal and material realities that bind, and always have bound, Indigenous cultures with and as sky Country are deeply colonising. This is manifested both in the ways many contemporary engagements theorise and fetishise such conceptions as “new and exciting,” and through the violences and erasures that flow from such framings (Grossman 2023).

Within a concerted layering of absence, then, the concepts of *aer*, *terra*, *mare* and *caelum nullius* (emptiness of air, land, sea and outer space) are multiple and enduring. The idea of blankness speaks to a supposed lack of people, knowledge, Lore/Law, culture, ownership and theory in ways that stretch both backwards and onwards in time, into the earth and above it, and through relationships. It is not something of the past only, it folds around and empowers interventions and understandings that exist because of some kind of prior blankness. In evoking/insisting upon a (fictitious) blankness in such a context, ideas of *nullius* remake the earth, land, waters and sky, as places that might be owned, that might be possessed. Through ownership, through Western knowing and intervention, these empty places might be made full.

The makings of *nullius* endure. They are all around and they are here now. Through the valley where I live, along Darkwood road (it’s there in the name), were ancient red cedar trees, a species almost entirely wiped out in the first 100 years of colonisation. The microseason within which I write is the season of beautiful bright red new leaves on the cedars gleaming in the light of the sun; those we planted that now grow metres tall, well above our heads, and those young trees we see in the hills. It’s their place, here in this valley.

But these are babies, tiny and tiny babies compared to the mighty giants who lived here and who live here still in memory and story and earth (see Figure 2.2). Their ghosts are there in the garden, by the drive, in the footprint of the house.



Figure 2.2 Young cedar, so many were taken. Photo: Matt Webb

The trees were deemed suitable for the building of ships, and the crafting of timber; they were so valuable and desired by the new colony that all red cedar was deemed property of the Crown and regulations put in place around the industry (Gilbert 1971; Kiama Library n.d.; Miller 2011; Moore 2021). The high value of the timber propelled settlement on the mid-North Coast and other parts of the state and with it, frontier violence, including the murder of many Aboriginal people, and rampant extraction. 1½ pence per foot of cedar brought freed convicts and free settlers, as well as Aboriginal scouts and other workers to all these cedar valleys, remote as they were from colonial centres, denuding, extracting, colonising, sometimes killing, stealing, coerced, always building the colony.

My husband's grandfather was one of the men who lived here in these hills, sleeping out in the bush for months at a time on the ground or in a rough, temporary shelter. The trees, the exploited people who exploited in turn, all were part of the part of the pattern of *nullius*. Red cedar, those mighty trees, their connections and lives only seen as valuable in as much as they provided an important tool for empire building, a more-than-human necropolitics (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003), and, again, the connections including the medicinal uses of cedar by Aboriginal people were silenced, Aboriginal people themselves and their efforts to defend their Country, ignored, violently suppressed. The season of this writing is full of grief and loss.

These are some currents that lead to Milpirri. The cold air and the warm air do not come from nowhere; there are conditions in their production. They travel, they have histories. The storm cloud is heavy with loss and hard truths. I mourn for those trees, for the people killed, for the more-than-human weathers violently suppressed, for the system that brutalised humans and non-humans alike. For me, though, some of those very conditions brought about the reality of unearned privilege that have allowed me to be here in this beautiful place that is also a killing field. I benefit from the ways *nullius* is produced and produced and produced. For many, whose paths are different, there are the hard, multigenerational realities of lives and futures and Country stolen.

Watching a video on YouTube of one of the original television advertisements for the assisted migration scheme offered to my parents and others to entice them to migrate, I see the globe spin, the white hand lands on Australia.⁴ A voice intones in a plum British accent:

Come over to the sunny side now. Australia: a great place for families. Opportunities for you, fine for your wife, great for your children. You could be on the way to a sunnier future in the new year.

There is a double movement here—a flattening of weather, an erasure of Indigenous prior becomings and belongings, a denial of violence and theft, yet there is also an attempt to domesticate weather and, ultimately, deploy it in the service of Empire. Agencies of weather, particularly the ideas of sun and “fineness,” are enrolled to promote white migration, white, ongoing colonisation to a “new” and “young” country in need of the kind of development that only British citizens can bring; this “sunnier future.” There is class and gender here too: both the talk of opportunity and financial stability that weather might offer and the financial

subsidisation that underpins the scheme is targeted strongly at working-class people. The article accompanying this ad points out that Mrs Jones's husband, formerly a fitter of Brighton, now owns his own grocery business and a 1000-pound car. And Australia is, "fine" for his wife. Her part of the sunnier future appears to be limited to her ability to procreate and raise white families.

For many who came to Australia on this and other schemes, migration promised a means of advancement, of class mobility and a move away from class tensions, the challenges of the war years, the conflicts and histories of home, with the conflicts and tensions and histories of Australia made invisible (Fouweather 2013). It was a dream of a clean slate, of opportunities for progression and accrual. The sun is enrolled as an agent that might help make it possible to construct and "own" this dream, to possess it, manifested, for example, through housing, like the kinds of houses my dad helped build. There's an old Wimpey ad advertising houses in Castle Hill and Fairfield, Darug land, in Sydney's West, "Remember," it says, "the Wimpey Price includes land, clothes hoist, letter box even, in fact there are no hidden extras."

It's the whole package: the land, the home, the sun to dry the clothes outside on a hills hoist. All underpinned by (dis)possession. This is stuff you can buy! As the advertisement proclaims: "Why is Australia so generous with assisted passages? Because she wants more British settlers to share in her development and prosperity. Australia is growing fast; there is room for *you* now."

Goenpul scholar Eileen Moreton-Robinson points out that systems of Western property not only seek to replace Indigenous relations and land-as-Country with possessive, capitalist extraction and accumulation, but that they do more; they fundamentally make settler-occupation seem natural, inevitable (2015). The Western system of property, upholds, justifies and naturalises colonisation while the existence of the settler is built upon, predicated upon, the theft of land and erasure of Indigenous peoples, cultures, laws and Countries. And within this, land is deemed an object. It is something, by nature of its emptiness, its lack of agency and spirit, that may be bought and sold (Blatman-Thomas and Porter 2019; Blomley 2016; Watts 2013). Weather, imbricated as part of Country, is flattened and moulded, seemingly obediently, to be part of the package. Weather is not so much specifically owned as much as something migrants might be entitled to as part of their possession of the land.

This was a dream of my parents, one of opportunity for them and their kids, and one that they worked hard for and believed in. And, yes, in my memories of being a kid, there is the sun, swinging on the hills hoist, and the beach holidays camping by the water, somehow quintessentially Australian, as was the silence of how that camping ground got to be there. Who was moved? Whose Country is this? What stories are told of that river that came to the ocean, the ochre, the massacres, the ceremonies, the spirits, stolen people, stolen children, seasonal messages ignored?

And so, despite what the Wimpey ad might claim about there being no hidden extras, there *are* things hidden, deep, important things, and many, many layers of them. Or perhaps, invisibilised is a better term. Made *nullius*, made invisible.

And, even though many of these migrants were working class, and even though they may not have been grand architects of these or any other schemes, may not have been decision makers of consequence or the beneficiaries of grand capitalist accumulation, may have struggled to make ends meet, been exploited too within a system of patriarchal and racialised capitalism, were lied to and misled with false promises in many instances, did not mean to create harm and acted in good faith with the information that was provided to them, they *did* come and *were* invited (by the government!) and *were* able to gain opportunities that simply were not granted to Aboriginal people. Intergenerationally, many of the children and grandchildren of these 10-pound poms have had access to education, stand to inherit (or have inherited) those no-longer cheap houses of the Sydney basin and elsewhere. The Wimpey house that we lived in when my family first came to Australia in the outer suburbs of Sydney is still there, although now there is a second story, a driveway, a two-story garage. Instead of being surrounded by glasshouses in which migrants primarily from former-Yugoslavia grew tomatoes (so-called glass-city) to feed greater metropolitan Sydney, there are houses and more houses—McMansions. The place would be worth well over a million dollars now.

The complexities and challenges faced, and the myriad exclusions and exploitations that bind us all in different ways, are very real and need to be tended. These include multilayered oppressions and exclusions faced by many 10-pound poms themselves (see, for example, Hammerton and Coleborne 2001), and the experiences of many people of colour, refugees, economic migrants and others whose migration paths were so very much more fraught (for an important discussion by a woman of Indian heritage whose parents migrated via Fiji through schemes of indentured labour, see Morris 2023).

Yet these should not be offered or understood as a “move to innocence” within a system that foundationally is created on theft of land (Tuck and Yang 2012). Because what (differential) opportunities the 10-pound poms and other migrants did have, the hills hoists and letterboxes and houses and treasured camping holidays by the beach, our red cedar plantings and my chance to see and learn from them, even the struggles of some to survive and thrive in a racist, classist, heteronormative and patriarchal society, were and are only there, the *only way they are there* is because of the dispossession of Aboriginal people. As the Chief Justice Brennan of the Mabo decision pointed out, dispossession has underwritten the development of this country. At the time my parents were subsidised to come, seduced with promises of sunshine and affordable housing, Aboriginal people were not allowed to marry without approval, not able to vote, were subject to harsh controls and restrictions of their movement and intimate details of their lives, had their children systematically stolen from them, laboured for rations rather than pay.⁵ In the late 1970s, the Wik people through the then titled Aboriginal Development Corporation tried to buy, yes buy, some of their *own* native lands inland from Aurukun, but the premier of Queensland at the time, the notorious Joh Bjelke-Petersen, refused to allow the transfer. Although there was a successful High Court Challenge led by the late John Koowarta (see Howard 1992: *Koowarta v Bjelke-Petersen* [1982] HCA 27; (1982) 39 ALR 417),⁶ by the time the case was

decided, the Bjelke-Petersen government had declared the area a national park and in doing so rendered the challenge void (Howard 1992; Martin 1997). Those “fine” opportunities, it’s clear, were only for some.

The contours of *nullius* that would insist on an empty country and flat and compliant weather have long roots, though they wouldn’t be considered “long” in the context of Aboriginal weather cultures that grew with this continent itself. It’s a contour with long reach too, with many of the spoils of colonisation finding their way back to the United Kingdom and other colonial powers, underwriting their development. Contours of produced *nullius* are thick with legal fictions and political wranglings, with amnesia and denial, with advertising and migration, everyday practices of invisibilisation, with overt violence and displacement, and with certain knowledge frameworks.

There are so many ways that *nullius* is and was actively produced. The “discovery” of Australia, the claiming, the “alienation” to private property. The very meaning of the nation itself has been propelled by colonising and racist approaches to weather. In order to look more into the role of weather in the construction of the nation-state of Australia, and the ways weather was/is deployed to propel colonisation, I want now to peek into some discussions of those who were involved in its founding. In particular, I turn to a symbolically important “founding moment”—the siting of the capital—before then turning back to myself and what it means for my own relationships with weather as a settler on unceded Aboriginal land.

The weather has been part of the story of the settler-colonial state of Australia since its conception; it is part of its racist imagination, its active crafting. As I delve a little more into details of how this came about, I aim to engage with the power geometries of weathering places to think/do weather and colonisation in radically contextual, place-based ways (Howitt 2011).

Making a capital

I get flooded out

Stay the night in town with a friend

[Late Spring, towards the
end of October]

Australia officially became an independent Commonwealth nation in 1901 when the British Parliament passed legislation allowing the six British colonies on the continent to govern in their own right (Wright et al 2020). In line with its new status, Australia needed a capital. The choosing of the location was a fraught and drawn-out process, with the two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, each vying for position and neither conceding to the other. Eventually, a compromise was reached that Melbourne would act as the interim capital while the ultimate site would be close to Sydney, at a distance of no less than 100 miles from the city (160 kilometres) (Ling 2013: 7).

The decision was included as section 25 of the Constitution and instigated a search for a suitable site through which particular weather-places were imagined as more suited to the practices of settler-capitalist-racialised-patriarchal governing

than others. Indeed, within the search, itself redolent with both symbolic and perceptible power, weather was a key, and highly contested, actant. The Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Australia framed the issue in the following terms:

The Federal Capital should be central, easily accessible, not unduly exposed to the risk of war or invasion, and its climate should not be such as to render it an undesirable place to live.

(Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Australia 1986,
cited in House of Reps 8 October 1903)

The Aboriginal peoples whose Countries were being discussed and potentially “selected” through this process included those of the Walgalu, Ngunnawal, Ngarigo and Wuradjeri nations. Within the entitled pick-and-choose of colonial privilege with its concomitant drive for possession, these diverse Aboriginal nations and their Countries were once again invisibilised as *nullius* (Coulthard 2014; Moreton-Robinson 2015). And in selecting a site with a “not undesirable” climate, lay an attempt to enrol weather in this invasion, an enactment of immense entitlement and violence.

The process was imagined as technocratic and technoscientific with the complex worlds of weather and its connections reduced to manageable parts. According to the Report from the Royal Commission and subsequent debates, climate was to be considered in the following ways:

Elevation above sea-level; Rainfall (amount and how distributed through the year); Temperature (mean for each month, as well as maximum and minimum) and Frequency of fog, mist, snow, and hot or cold winds.

(Royal Commission on Sites for the Seat of Government 1904: iii)

Weather, it was imagined, would do its bit within this deliberate construction of a white nation. And the racialised settler state, indeed colonialism’s very success, would be propelled in its realisation by a white, cold capital. It’s an interesting transition that occurred between this time and the call for the sun of the post-war years. Here, in these foundational moments, the idea of whiteness seems more precarious than in the sunny promises of assisted migration schemes of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. A white colonial Australia is something that must be created, mobilised and supported however possible (Jayasuriya et al 2003). For Australia is being made in these spaces and interactions, through powerfully interwoven tropes of weather, race and colonialism.

As Senator Pearce conjectured of Bombala (Ngarigo Country):

There is no objection to the summer climate of Bombala; but it is said of the winter climate that it is subject to bleak cold winds, with occasional falls of snow. This Senate is largely, or at any rate to some extent, composed of men, or the sons of men, who came from the United Kingdom. To which site is there the greater objection? To a site with a bleak winter, or a site

with a humid summer? Is it not a fact that the white race reaches its greatest perfection in cold and bleak countries rather than in countries of humid atmospheres.

(Senator Pearce 14.10.1903)

The white race is imagined to reach its perfection with low humidity, to reach its pinnacle with a bleak, cold capital. In these claims, the politicians were supported by academic work, including by geographers. The influential geographer and meteorologist, Griffith Taylor, for example, used a racial hierarchy to posit causal links between climate and racial traits. He maintained that Aboriginal people were some of the “least fit” and so were destined to die out as whites expanded to settle all “useable lands” (Taylor 1937). Indeed, in considering climate knowledges in Australia, O’Gorman traces the ways that climate science was foundational in establishing norms related to weather in support of colonial expansion; seeking to make weather useful in a wide range of situations from water management, colonial agriculture and government planning (O’Gorman 2014; see also Beattie et al 2014; O’Gorman et al 2016). As O’Gorman et al point out, “Colonial weather and climate knowledge had an essential and fundamentally practical purpose—to ensure settlement’s success” (2016: 898).

And indeed, it must be said that enrolments of weather in the colonising project were not limited to Australia. One of the reasons that Griffith Taylor was so influential in Australia was because his work, including a world map outlining distributions of racial and linguistic groups that posited causal links between climate and race and made claims of fitness and longevity, drew upon and extended much-prevailing thinking of the day. Indeed, the study of weather and climate including in geography have long been dominated by overly deterministic and deeply racist approaches, as well as by studies directly pursued in the interests of empire (Peet 1985). Through the 1800s and 1900s, the geographic theorisation of relationships between climate, culture and societies overtly supported imperial and capitalist agendas drawing heavily on evolutionary biology and other racialised scientific disciplines (Peet 1985). Tropes in the form of “scientific explanations” of tropical degeneracy and “European vigour” were widely deployed to justify and propel colonial expansion (Endfield 2011; Golinski 2021; Hoffmann 2018; Peet 1985). As I have written elsewhere with Matalena Tofa (Wright and Tofa 2021: 1134), “depoliticised notions of weather and climate as determining forces that might shape individuals and societies, may all too readily be appropriated for racist and eugenicist ideologies.”

In many colonial contexts, science and data became a way to sever settler-colonisers from their relationalities and responsibilities (Grossman 2023; LaFay 2023; Ravenscroft 2018). Further, the deploying of science and data in this way has laid the foundation for ways of knowing, counting and communicating weather to this day (Golinski 2019). As Grossman (2023: 14) states, “weather data recording and measurement have deeply shaped settler environmental consciousnesses, access to land and Land,⁷ and the capacity for settlers to narrate their past and imagine a future.” Many contemporary infrastructures of weather including weather

forecasting, the datasets held by bureaus of meteorology throughout the world, as well as responses to weather, directly build upon atomistic frameworks that act to sever relationships with place. Weather data, and the institutions of weather, continue to empower white supremacist, capitalist visions of place and propel ideas of a coherent nation.

If we go back to Canberra, we can see some of the ways weather science is deployed. In the first debates of the Australian Parliament's House of Representatives one Member of Parliament (MP) argued:

If scientists were appealed to they would with one voice attest that those who are born and reared in localities at a considerable elevation, and in a cool climate, are hardier than are those of the same race brought up in the humid climate of the sea coast. A change from one climate to the-other is good at all times, and that is one of the reasons why I wish to have a Capital site from which easy access may be had to the sea coast.

(Mr Clarke MP 08.10.1903)

Yet, despite appeals to science's unifying predictions (the "one voice" of those scientists) with their measurable outcomes, Mr Clarke's comments appear to be underpinned with a degree of fear and uncertainty. Mr Clarke's appeal is emotive, as are many of the others of this debate, with weather deeply entwined through peoples' sense of self and rightness. The weather is understood to make people in particular ways that are bound deeply with imagined histories of self and nation. Further, such imaginaries need, seemingly, to be defended and marshalled lest they shift and defuse. As Mr O'Malley MP holds forth:

The history of the world shows that cold climates have produced the greatest geniuses, all of whom were born north of a certain degree In conclusion, let me say this: look where we like, it will be found that wherever a hot climate prevails, the country is revolutionary. Take the sons of some of the greatest men in the world, and out them into a hot climate like Tumut or Albury, and in three generations their lineal descendants will be degenerate I want to have a cold climate chosen for the capital of this Commonwealth. I am glad that the Minister for Defence has put that point before us.

(Mr O'Malley MP 08.10.1903)

Mr O'Malley is invoking a particular colonial white supremacist dream of co-becoming weather; a dream of cold perfection and bleak genius; as if weather could be enrolled to create a country of white male subjects—non-degenerate, hardy in their bracing whiteness. And in this task, science and history, "the" history of the world no less, weather itself is assembled. And yet, despite this alluded-to hardiness, there is a sense of precarity. It would apparently only take a generation or two of humidity to destroy these sons. Despite being a child of migrants, my child, my nephews and nieces, already may be in this state of degeneration (awesome! Though not that simple, unfortunately).

The lauded genius and toughness of these UK sons, is seemingly *very* fragile, deeply threatened by heat, by the sea, and by humidity, by Aboriginal people, by women, by people of colour, by those from continental Europe, by anything other than cold, high-altitude temperate climates peopled by sons of the United Kingdom. They might be threatened too by floods that move us differently, as does the rising water of the Bellinger River now as I write. These moving waters create connections with neighbours, bringing to light interdependence as we come together as the low bridges of our valley go underwater as they so often do. I stay a night in town for a much-appreciated catch-up with friends. We laugh and thank the weather for a sneaky night off from parenting as my daughter and husband are at home together and I am away on the town. But I'm not actually joking.

Lurking beneath these men's ardent proclamations is an awareness that this place will change them if they cannot change it first. For Mr Clarke, Mr O'Malley, Senator Pearce and the rest, siting the capital is a strategic move within a broader struggle, an attempt to resist Country and assert control by weathering it in particular ways. Moreton-Robinson (2015) powerfully points out that anxiety always lurks with possession. It is a symptom of attempting to possess that which is not, can never be, yours.

The moves of possession, of creating the settler state of Australia is never complete. The process of producing *nullius* is ongoing, never finished. It is not only in formative moments of nation and self, but in ongoing imagination, construction and policing of peoples and peoples-as-nations that weather is enrolled. The emphasis on topologies, and their ability to shift and persevere, is both instructive when talking of Indigenous belonging and survivance, yes, but also in the persistence of colonising processes. The deployment of weather to harm, to (re)create a certain kind of nation persists. In contemporary Australia, for example, the ongoing strategic siting of Australia's immigration detention facilities in "undesirable," often unseen weather-places seeks to both discipline asylum seekers and deter future journeys (Freyer and McKay 2021; Mountz 2020). Heat and isolation are deployed as part of a wide range of horrific conditions that create a system of deprivation both intentionally punitive and heavy with manufactured precarity (Van Kooy and Bowman 2019).

In the ways that it continues to enrol weather in a racist and conservative process of nation-building, Australia is not alone. Consider, for example, the contemporary example of the hieleras, the ice-boxes, used by immigration authorities on the US-Mexican border. In hieleras, potential asylum seekers and other migrants from Central America are punished with cold. The cracked lips of children, numbed and shivering bodies, is punitive weather, a material expression of the state's racialised practices of control (Riva 2017). Heat is also used on this border as a means of dissuading, harming, evening killing asylum seekers that are directed by infrastructure and government policy to dangerous desert crossings (De León and Wells 2015; Radiolab 2018).

This use of heat and cold, and struggles over weather, can be traced through histories and presents of white supremacy and colonialism, and resistances to it. Tony Perry looks to the ways cold and wintery environments were experienced and

leveraged by enslaved peoples in struggles over power in antebellum Maryland in the USA (Perry 2017). Both enslaved peoples and slave owners differentially brought cold weather into service against one another. For enslaved peoples, he says, “cold weather was both an afflicting as well as empowering force.” Other scholars have looked to weather and slavery through discussions of heat and changing seasons (Rutman et al 1980; see also Stewart 1997). And to trace this to contemporary experiences of urban inequality, the work of Grover (2020) has looked to Baton Rouge, Louisiana in the United States, to see the way heat, drainage, and weathery infrastructures are important parts of the racial division and discord of the city. Heat is part of the infrastructure of racial inequality that has divided Baton Rouge into two separate cities.

Weather’s very materiality, its verticality and mobility as air and heat and cold, its thickness and its potential for connections and relationships, can be, and is, used to exert power. In a contemporary policing context, for example, different police technologies and practices are used in a kind of three-dimensional policing, a verticalised omniscience and a weaponised atmosphere. Linnemann and Turner’s (2022) work draws this out in detail; the ways tear gas, aerial surveillance, and highly sensitised microphones use atmospheres to control and to administer violence. This extends to more-than-human experiences of atmosphere, as well. The use of sniffer dogs, for example, helps extend “the drug war’s prohibitionist demands to the air that surrounds the human body” extending policing’s atmospheric and olfactory reach (p. 27).

Here, weather’s materiality and agency, the more-than-human politics in which it plays a powerful role, are violent; the smells and connections, the atmospheric agencies of weather, are engaged in exclusionary ways. Weather’s materiality has the potential to connect, to teach, to em-place, yes, but, clearly, there is also potential for it to be richly deployed in these vicious, coercive and colonising ways, all of which play a powerful role in the ongoing making of *nullius*; helping to create the control needed for a blank space. These deployments remain, their contemporary expressions in part a reflection of sedimented pasts which are experienced in very different ways by different people. As Kathryn Yusoff (2016: 9) points out, “different forms of inequality have result[ed] from the differential harnessing of these geopowers.”

Relationships and intra-action with weather clearly cannot be isolated from issues of power. Thus, understanding weather as embodied, as an intra-action between people and place, as brought about through relationships, is not inherently progressive or decolonising. These shifting contours of power must be attended to.

Prior and enduring belongings

King tides at Christmas

Shrill calls of cicadas demand we wake up

[January, mid-Summer]

When the site for the new capital of the newly formed settler-state of Australia was named Canberra in 1913, the place that was named and claimed was not *nullius*, not

terra nullius nor *aer nullius*. It was already a place of Aboriginal history, of prior nations and belongings and of diverse sovereignties. The weather-places of so-called Australia, with their many patterns and evolving relationships, have always supported and been supported by human and more-than-human legal-political-social-ecological systems. The Country/ies that the new government chose to be the seat of colonial government were already places bound by Indigenous systems of governance and legal orders, Indigenous nations. They were places of deep agency, both human and more-than-human. Those places continue to nourish and sustain different forms of relations in spite of colonial disruptions (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Simpson 2014; Watts 2013).

Canberra, that site selected specifically for its coldness and bleakness which, in the white supremacist dreams of those doing the choosing, was meant to sure up a settled and uncontested/able white nation, has instead nourished a long history of ongoing Indigenous political expression (Foley et al 2014). One of the most significant land rights protests in the 20th century, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, started in Canberra in 1972 and remains to this day. The Embassy, erected on Crown Land in sight of parliament house, asserts the ongoing sovereignty of Aboriginal people and is a long-standing reminder that Indigenous legal orders, Indigenous belongings with and as Country and Country-as-weather, are still here, still viable and vital. As Kurt Iveson has said, the Embassy acts “both an embodiment of Aboriginal sovereignty and a thorn in the side of those whose authority to regulate the space is founded on colonial dispossession” (2017: 3).

Not only is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy an ongoing manifestation of sovereignty in Canberra itself but it also speaks to, and continues to inspire, expressions of sovereignty throughout the continent, on/with/as many other Aboriginal nations. Many sovereign Aboriginal Embassies have been created over the past 50 years since the establishment of the embassy in Canberra: on Djap Murrung Country in an attempt to sacred protect trees from a planned highway expansion; at Matagarup (Heirisson Island in Perth, Western Australia) on Nyungah Country as a refuge and refugee camp for those displaced from their homelands throughout the state; at Glenelg in South Australia where members of six Aboriginal nations from the Portland and Heywood region called for Aboriginal land justice and equal access to services; and on many others including here on Gumbaynggirr Country where Gumbaynggirr people assert their sovereignty and self-determination.⁸ The heat that those politicians feared in the siting of the capital of Australia is there in the sacred fires that burn at Aboriginal Embassies in many nations of Australia.

As I’ve written collaboratively with Lara Daley and Faith Curtis (Wright et al 2020: 216 see also Daley and Wright 2022), “Through the Tent Embassy movement, the sacred fire travels, carried across nations, igniting place-based resistance with other Country/ies, interacting with other resistances and agencies, human and more-than-human (see for example Daigle 2016; Daley 2019). Thus heat, fire and place all nourish resistance in different places, in different ways, refusing to be extinguished by colonial weatherings of place.”

Weather acts politically in diverse ways and has the capacity to resist and evade capitalist-colonial enclosures. While imagined as a place to support colonial

governance, Canberra continues to support diverse beings and becomings including nourishing everyday acts of self-determination and resistance both in and as Canberra and within many other Aboriginal nations, in Countries throughout the continent. This is both a spread of ideas and knowledges, of practices, of more-than-human agencies and of kinship.

On Gumbaynggirr Country, we are now in the season of cicada calling and the king tides that push in high on the beaches and estuaries. The cicadas are loud. They demand attention to their presence, their call is a call for us to listen to Country, to live here, now, in ways that acknowledge the cycles past, the years underground, the connection of earth, sea, sky; to see and to live the fullness of Country and all its prior belongings. Gumbaynggirr people continue in this Country to nurture it, to connect, to struggle against *nullius*, to demand attention to presence.

Dwelling in Milpirri means interrogating power and positionality, and working to do things differently. For me, this means many things. It means telling different stories, respecting knowledges, tending to relationships with people and with more-than-human Country. It means caring for the place I live in, for the farm, replanting red cedar that has been taken and being led in ceremony to nurture the growth of the new trees, manifesting their future where, once again mighty and long after I am dead, the trees stand once more in more-than-human communities. This is a big project of learning from and with place, to know seasons and carefully tend to seedlings through frost and hot sun, the heat belting down on both us and them, and the complex interactions of grass and wallaby (who loves those new shoots) and shade and more-than-human song that might hold this fledging renewed community.

And, also, responding to the very real histories of violence and dispossession that endure here, including of stolen land. That means paying rent on this place to Gumbaynggirr traditional owners, and seeking, as we are, legal and other pathways that might shift the land tenure of this complexly beautiful place that is our home so it can move away from an exclusionary, Western, extractivist bundle of rights towards something more relational. We are looking to a covenant, binding agreement/s, a “gifting” of land (though that term isn’t appropriate with its connotation of generosity; rather it is a return, a reparation, a release from these chains of possession), although any formal approach needs to be deeply grounded in living Country-led agreements, based in a respectful protocol. Fundamentally, and most importantly, Gumbaynggirr living protocols and Lore/Law have to be respected; binding, as Aunty Shaa says, needs to be led by Country and hold the truths of Country’s connectivities, the ways we are bound together. It is early days, but discussions are happening (Yandaarra with Gumbaynggirr Country et al Forthcoming, and also around the kitchen table and over coffees and working in the paddock and sitting by the river). It is clear that attending to respectful relationships on and with this Country that has been stolen is an active and ongoing responsibility. Such moves are needed if connections with and as Country, with and as weather, are to be meaningful; if we are to move from the thunderous storm cloud to more genuinely respectful relations. These are complex and important discussions, and they are urgent (*ibid.*). And all this is most definitely not meant as a move to innocence, a move to comfort

(Land 2015) but, rather, a move towards relationality; a move of responsibility-as, in partial acknowledgement of what has been stolen, and a form of repair.

Coming into Milpirri, following this contour of (un)learning and (un)doing power and positionality, means consciously undermining many assumptions including assumptions associated with settler-colonial-white futurities. These are different forms of partial, emergent belongings that work against possession (Daley and Wright 2024; Wright 2015). They are non-possessive belongings that challenge privilege, actively working to dismantle it (Land 2015; Porter and Barry 2016). Following Dallas Hunt, a member of Swan River First Nation in what is now known as Canada writes, this means dwelling in “the affective spaces of white fragility, to engage with narratives that consider the possibility of disappearance.” The storm cloud is a place of complex intra-action. Being there well means supporting diverse kinships and legal orders, rising up with a personal-political commitment against, among other things, white supremacy and possessive belongings (Hunt 2018; Kwaymullina 2016; Motta 2023; Paradies 2020; Whyte 2018). Balance comes about through living agreements and reciprocal (more-than-human) respect.

If possession is never done, but is something that settler-colonisers (people, culture and institutions) must defend, remake (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Tuck and Yang 2012), then I want to lay down those defences and try to remake differently. The capital of so-called Australia, Yass-Canberra, chosen eventually in 1908, has never actually been settled in any finished and complete way (Howitt 2020; Simpson 2014). In the moment of its making, there was and always is an unmaking, and the potential for change, for different histories and presents. In the desperation of the white men who debated so pompously, in the efforts to enrol weather and weather agencies, weather nonetheless persists in ways unbound. In the Aboriginal people, their ancestors, cultures, belongings and future descendants, who were invisibilised but very much there, in the women, the people of colour—in all beings that defied, refused, lived and live outside this fantasy—there is persistence. There is the ongoing call of cicadas, insisting that humans attend, pay attention, to shift towards connection, there is something different, there is survivance (Vizenor 2008). I’ll trace more of that survivance in the following chapter.

Spiralling onwards

*River is perfect for swimming, lazy days
Heat on the flat hits like a wall*

[February, late Summer]

I want to have a climate where men can hope. We cannot have hope in hot countries. When I go down the streets of this city on a hot summer’s day and see the people in a melting condition, I look upon them with sorrow and wish I were away in healthy Tasmania. I hope that the site selected will be Bombala, and that the children of our children will see an Australian Federal city that will rival London in population, Paris in beauty, Athens in culture, and Chicago in enterprise.

(Mr O’Malley MP, 08.10.1903)

I am sitting here writing this conclusion in late summer, in a “melting condition.” I am spending as much time as I can in the river with friends and family, or resting in the heat. I would be pleased for Mr O’Malley to look upon me in sorrow. In fact, writing this, I’m allowing myself a moment to imagine his horror or shock. I don’t know what he’d make of me really, if he could read what I, a woman (!), a professor (?!), working with, learning from, connecting with Aboriginal people (!?#) with diverse kinship networks and place-based realities (???) am writing here (*&%^). Well, fuck you, Mr O’Malley. For me, this melting condition does give me some cautious hope, hope that in the shifts and persistence of weather, things might shift differently, and for the better.

But it must be said, my hope is cautious, it’s modest and, yes, it also is laced with sorrow. Because, once again, I must acknowledge I am here through others’ dispersal. My well-intentioned words and nice actions are based on dispossession. I am a receiver of stolen goods—or that is not quite right because I did pay for them in some racialised-patriarchal-capitalist version of an open market. I certainly laboured for this place, so perhaps I was taken in by a fraudulent scam, purchased something that should never have been for sale, using money that circulated in a system based on inequality, extraction and theft. The scam endures though, so I can still be here protected by the state and, regardless of what I think about it, I still live in and of this capitalist world.

I have traced this contour of power and positionality to unpack some layers of privilege that have brought me here, to this place, on this land. I step into the learning that this Country, this weather, has always been an important more-than-human agent in the struggles over colonisation. Weather and weather science continue to be enrolled in the colonial project in an attempt to re-enact weather and Country as *nullius*. My learnings and unlearnings are an important protocol in moving forward towards Milpirri, part of what it means to weather on and as unceded Indigenous land. These are some of my abilities to respond-as the histories, positionalities, materialities of Country. Indeed, as I tend to different contours of weather, my aim is to trace different paths towards Milpirri, to reflect deeply on what it might mean to come into the storm cloud by attending to these difference contours, and to potentially move beyond the thunder to the rains of Milpirri. Milpirri is a place of responsibility-*as*. In this case, it means tending to some of my responsibilities as part of systems of colonisation, exclusion and unearned privilege.

As I have tried to attend to some of weather’s belongings/non-belongings, inclusions and exclusions, materiality and struggle, I have worked here with two moments, that of the siting of Canberra and of the migration of my parents to Australia, to acknowledge and investigate two important, overt points in the processes of how *terra nullius* and *aer nullius* are produced and contested in so-called Australia, at least for me, in my life. While these are both historical, I want to emphasise that moments of weather colonisation are not in and of the past. Rather, I chose these moments to name and track continuities through weather’s beings and becomings to here, to the microseasons of my life and home. Stories, as Rebecca Solnit (2014) has said, provide compasses and infrastructure for our journey. Here, the stories

I've told aim to direct me towards a different relation with weather, inwards to the storm cloud, inwards to responsibility-as. These pasts make this present. It is how and why I am here, now.

After all, the coldness returns with winter, as does the heat both after and before that, in seasons that come and go and come again, differently. For, despite the promises made to the 10-pound poms, *every* summer is not just like last year's. While, in the 1960s, those advertisements implied that weather would behave for white people, it has always escaped domestication. Ever more so, in light of a changing climate.

The production of *aer nullius* continues. From the emergence of racist tropes of human-climate interactions, to weather long deployed to shore up colonialism, weather knowledges have been enrolled as part of a broader catalogue of colonising ways of knowing, categorising and controlling environments. And today, in national and international policy around mitigating and adapting to climate change, these ways of knowing, categorising and controlling persist; they are enmeshed and re-made both as legacies and as ongoing enactments of colonial and racist and capitalist, exclusionary forms of knowing-doing-being. These contours I will trace more directly in Chapter 6 as I look to contours of weathering connections and co-becoming climate.

Settler colonialism, international development, mainstream geography and dominant modes of human-environment relations continue to shape, and be shaped by, climate knowledge and weather. What we know, what is measured, what is shared and how are based on models that were made, conceived through ideals of capitalist imperialism, with colonial data informing present forecasting and research. Settler colonialism, post-colonies and "former" colonisers continue to shape institutions, borders, the meanings of nations themselves, in ways imbricated with weather: from the federal government with its dreams of bleak whiteness, trajectories of invasion and violence, and that continues to be supported through epistemological and ontological frameworks, vast and complex and deeply imbued with exclusionary logics.

And yet, weather is so much more than this. There is a richness in weather's contours, its patterns and relationships, its agencies and materialities, its exclusions, politics and violences. There is the thunderhead, the ceremony cloud of difference, of clashing and lightning, of warm and cold air. Weather and weathery relationships support, challenge and undermine in different ways for different people at different times. Indeed, stories of the weather confounding efforts to control, measure and understand it proliferate within early scientific and colonising endeavours. Empire's demands for precise and standardised measurements of weather were constantly challenged by local climatic diversity, while colonisers struggled, and failed, to bring weather under control. Behaviours (including forms of dress and daily schedules) that they saw as inherently "civilising" and efforts to manipulate buildings, places and landscapes to bring them into line with European-based norms were set against place-based architectures and practices of place. Thus, dreams of bleak whiteness failed and will continue to fail.

Weather will not be constrained. The rain of Milpirri will come.

Notes

- 1 Most British citizens were able to avail of this scheme including those in Malta and Turkey. There were also programmes of assisted migration from Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Assisted migration from white Britain, however, was substantially the largest cohort.
- 2 Throughout the scheme, many migrants went to basic migrant hostels or found themselves in remote towns, sometimes in dangerous circumstances. These situations were a far cry from those advertised.
- 3 For a summary and discussion of this case see AIATSIS, *The Mabo Case* at <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/mabo-case#:~:text=The%20Mabo%20Case%20was%20successful,land%20belonging%20to%20no%20one.&text=The%20five%20Meriam%20people%20who,Meriam%20women%2C%20Celuia%20Mapo%20Sale>
- 4 The commercial is available to watch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoY29Y6Y_IQ
- 5 While I am talking here about British migration, others enrolled in this dream have come from Asia, Africa and the Americas. Many of these migrants have faced racism and exploitation in ways that cannot be diminished or denied. Yet they too could vote and own land and labour for pay rather than rations, marry without government interference, not have their children systematically stolen from them, been counted, unlike Indigenous people from the many Countries that make up so-called Australia.
- 6 See [1982] HCA 27; [1982] 39 ALR 417. Available at <http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/cases/cth/HCA/1982/27.html> and <http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/LawCite?cit=%281982%29%2039%20ALR%20417>. Accessed 28.11.23.
- 7 Following Indigenous scholars and leaders from Turtle Island, Land here is capitalised as a proper noun to indicate its agency, complexity and relationality, much like Country is capitalised through this book. See, for example, Liboiron (2021) and Styres et al (2013).
- 8 For information about these embassies, see Djap Wurrung Embassy (2019), Martin (2019), Portland Aboriginal Tent Embassy Press Release (2013) and Georgatos (2015).